

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-14

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMCONSUL BELIZE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KINGSTON PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR, GT, UK, BH

SUBJECT: BELIZE: PRESS REPORT

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF AP STORY ON BELIZE BY GEORGE GEDDA
WHICH RAN EARLY A.M. DECEMBER 30. SPANISH VERSION OF
STORY ALSO BEING CARRIED BY AP.

BEGIN TEXT. TOP SECRET NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN BRITAIN AND
GUATEMALA HAVE PRODUCED A TENTATIVE AGREEMENT IN THEIR
156-YEAR-OLD CONFLICT OVER THE STATUS OF THE BRITISH
COLONY OF BELIZE, ACCORDING TO DIPLOMATIC SOURCES.

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THE AGREEMENT, INVOLVING THE CESSION OF A SMALL AREA OF
BELIZE'S TERRITORY TO GUATEMALA, HAS YET TO BE APPROVED
BY THE PREMIER OF THE SELF-GOVERNING COLONY, GEORGE C.
PRICE, THE SOURCES SAY.

AN ADDED INDUCEMENT FOR GUATEMALA TO SETTLE WAS THE
PROMISE OF AN UNDETERMINED AMOUNT OF DEVELOPMENT ASSIS-

TANCE FROM BRITAIN, THE UNITED STATES AND PERHAPS OTHER COUNTRIES, ACCORDING TO THE INFORMANTS.

BELIZE, WEDGED BETWEEN GUATEMALA, MEXICO AND THE CARIBBEAN SEA, HAS BEEN CLAIMED BY GUATEMALA ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT INHERITED SPANISH SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE AREA. BRITAIN REJECTS THE CLAIM AND THE TWO COUNTRIES HAVE GONE TO THE BRINK OF WAR SEVERAL TIMES IN RECENT YEARS.

LAST JULY, BRITAIN RUSHED TROOPS, AIRCRAFT AND A NAVAL FRIGATE TO BELIZE TO HEAD OFF A GUATEMALAN INVASION THREAT.

AFTERWARD, GUATEMALAN FOREIGN MINISTER ADOLFO MOLINA ORANTES AND BRITISH FOREIGN OFFICE MINISTER EDWARD ROWLANDS INTENSIFIED A NEGOTIATING EFFORT THAT HAD GONE ON INTERMITTENTLY FOR THE PREVIOUS THREE YEARS.

THE SOURCES, WHO REQUESTED ANONYMITY, SAID THAT GUATEMALA MADE A MAJOR CONCESSION IN ACCEPTING A SMALL STRIP OF THINLY-POPULATED TERRITORY IN THE SOUTHERNMOST SECTION OF BELIZE AS THE PRICE FOR SETTLEMENT. SINCE GAINING INDEPENDENCE IN 1821, GUATEMALA HAS CLAIMED SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE ENTIRE TERRITORY.

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THE SIZE OF THE REGION THAT WOULD REVERT TO GUATEMALA WAS NOT SPECIFIED, BUT REPORTS RANGED FROM 5 PERCENT TO 15 PERCENT. IT IS SAID TO BE MADE UP MOSTLY OF SWAMP-LAND WITH A POPULATION NOT EXCEEDING 2,000.

THE FATE OF THE AGREEMENT NOW RESTS IN PRICE'S HANDS. HE INITIALLY WAS EXTREMELY RELUCTANT TO CEDE ANY TERRITORY TO GUATEMALA BUT HAS BEEN UNDER HEAVY PRESSURE TO GO ALONG WITH THE PROPOSAL.

PRICE'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE FORMULA WOULD PAVE THE WAY FOR ACHIEVEMENT OF HIS LONGSTANDING GOAL OF INDEPENDENCE FOR BELIZE.

THE BRITISH, WHO MAINTAIN ABOUT 2,000 TROOPS IN BELIZE, LOOK UPON THE COUNTRY AS AN EXPENSIVE HEADACHE.

THEY ARE SAID TO BE JUST AS ANXIOUS AS PRICE TO SEE THE TERRITORY BECOME INDEPENDENT, BUT TAKE SERIOUSLY THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE GUATEMALAN ARMY WOULD OVERRUN BELIZE IF INDEPENDENCE IS GRANTED WITHOUT A SETTLEMENT.

AS EXPLAINED BY THE SOURCES, PRICE IS FACED WITH AN AGONIZING CHOICE. HE WOULD LIKE TO BE RECALLED AS THE LEADER WHO GUIDED BELIZE TO INDEPENDENCE BUT HE HAS EXTREME RESERVATIONS ABOUT TAKING THAT STEP IF IT MEANS SURRENDER OF ANY BELIZE TERRITORY.

BELIZE, WITH ONLY 135,000 INHABITANTS, IS GEOGRAPHICALLY SMALLER THAN ALL BUT A FEW AMERICAN STATES. THE BRITISH ARE REPORTED TO FEEL IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT PRICE MOVE QUICKLY TO ACCEPT THE SETTLEMENT PLAN. IN MARCH, THE GUATEMALANS WILL ELECT A NEW PRESIDENT TO REPLACE GEN. KJELL LAUGERUD, WHO, ACCORDING TO DIPLOMATS, HAS SHOWN A GREATER DISPOSITION TO SETTLE THE BELIZE PROBLEM THAN ANY GUATEMALAN PRESIDENT IN THIS CENTURY.

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THREE MILITARY CANDIDATES ARE IN THE RACE TO SUCCEED LAUGERUD, EACH HAVING MADE HARDLINE CAMPAIGN STATEMENTS ON THE BELIZE ISSUE. END TEXT. CHRISTOPHER

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